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ABSTRACT

The 1977 Assembly focused on community forums, planned events providing an opportunity for broad participation and informed discussion of current issues of concern to local citizens. The background papers and recommendations of the Assembly are included in this report. "Why the Community College Should Be the Institutional Base," by Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr. and Roger Harrington, discusses community forums and the community college's role in sponsoring them. "The State of the Art," by E. John Schonieber, examines the nature of the forum and implications regarding community college sponsorship. "To Reach the Unreached," by A. Hugh Adams and David A. Goth, discusses community services and the community college in terms of clientele, needs assessment, and community forum planning and implementation. "Involving the Mass Media," by George A. Colburn and Darrell Icenogle, examines how the media can enhance the effectiveness of the community forum. "From Forum to Action," by Ralph Doty, gives suggestions on how community forum participants can act upon the information they have received through the forum. Recommendations for facilitating community forums are directed at community colleges, the AACJC, the federal government, and other agencies. (LH)

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Community Forums in Community Colleges

Forums for Citizen Education

ED149799

Report of the 1977 Assembly
of the American Association
of Community and Junior Colleges

Edited by Roger Yarrington

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Introduction

A community forum is a planned event or series of planned events that provides opportunity for broad participation and informed discussion of current issues of concern to local citizens. It may involve a mass town meeting, a series of neighborhood meetings, meetings sponsored by a variety of cooperating organizations, or even a "meeting" through the use of mass media (television, radio, newspapers, telephone, etc.). The key elements, whatever the form, are wide participation, issues of local concern, and informed discussion. Good forums will result in citizen education and action.

The experiences of numerous community colleges in the use of community forums for citizen education have led the sponsors of the Assembly to believe such

forums should be used by more of our institutions. We believe the state of the art can be advanced by community colleges and that the response of citizens will result in positive support when forums are done well.

AACJC has found the Assembly to be a useful means for discussing community college concerns and enlisting action. Assembly procedures were developed in previous sessions supported by grants from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. This Assembly has received assistance from the Ford Foundation, the Shell Companies Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities

A committee met earlier this year to assist in planning the Assembly. Participants were:

George A. Colburn, project director, Courses by Newspaper, University of California, San Diego.

Ralph R. Doty, president, Vermilion Community College, Minnesota.

Diane Eisenberg, director, Community College CbN Forums, AACJC.

Suzanne Fletcher, director, Community Education Program, AACJC.

John N. Gentry, president, National Manpower Institute, Washington, D.C.

Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., president, AACJC.

Peter Goldmark, president, Goldmark Communications Corporation, Connecticut.

Richard H. Hagemeyer, president, Central Piedmont Community College, North Carolina.

William A. Keim, president, Pioneer Community College, Missouri.

Constance McQueen, coordinator of adult programs, New York City Community College.

Thomas E. O'Connell, president, Berkshire Community College, Massachusetts.

Norman E. Watson, chancellor, Coast Community College District, California.

Roger Yarrington, vice president, AACJC.

The report of the Assembly discussions and recommendations was drafted by Stephen F. Silha, director of communications for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Michigan, and adopted by the Assembly participants. Authors of the background papers prepared for the Assembly are:

Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., president, and Roger Yarrington, vice president, AACJC.

E. John Schonleber, former director of the Courses by Newspaper Forum project in San Francisco, now a consultant to the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A. Hugh Adams, president, and David A. Groth, vice president for academic affairs, Broward Community College, Florida.

George A. Colburn, director of the national Courses by Newspaper project, and Darrell Icenogle, administrative analyst, La Jolla, California.

Ralph Doty, president of Vermilion Community College, Minnesota.

We are grateful for the assistance of these persons and organizations and for the contributions of the Assembly participants.

Roger Yarrington

Why Community Colleges Should Be the Institutional Base

By Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr.
and Roger Yarrington

President Carter has demonstrated in recent months that community forums can engage the interest of citizens and produce useful information and ideas. His television question and answer sessions with citizens, his town meetings in several localities, have been successful community forums. This is an old idea, based in America's democratic history. It is an idea whose time has come once again.

Community colleges are familiar with the idea. Many of these institutions have experience in conducting various forms of community forums.

— During the Bicentennial a number of community colleges participated in the "American Issues Forum" program spon-

sored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Community forums in a variety of formats were a part of some of those programs.

— Many community colleges have participated for years in the annual "Great Decisions" program sponsored by the Foreign Policy Association. Here, again, community forums have often been part of the program.

— The Courses by Newspaper Project supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities involves community colleges across the country and some of these institutions also use community forums as part of the local CbN program.

— AACJC is currently working with some specific colleges in a project funded by NEH to demonstrate how community forums can be utilized for citizen education in the humanities, using Courses by Newspaper materials.

Persons with experience in each of these types of programs have been invited to participate in the Assembly. Other participants have had experience in other community forum endeavors sponsored by by community colleges.

Further Development Needed

The community forum idea now needs further development. Leadership should come from community colleges. The idea fits the institutions and the way they should be operating in their communities. Community colleges should be close to the citizens, aware of their needs and concerns, ready to supply information, opportunity for discussion, and assistance in taking action.

There are issues in our democratic society which require citizen education for the shaping of public policy. Public policy in a democratic society will not be effective without informed public support.

Thomas Jefferson said in 1820: "I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion."

There are issues that relate to new conditions in America and they have aroused public confusion, uncertainty, skepticism, and frustration. Among these are the depletion of traditional resources for energy, economic inflation, increased health costs, rising crime rates, pollution of air and water, etc.

Community forums can assist in shaping public policy by:

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1. *Providing a disciplined approach to a statement of the questions.* We tend to to flail away at presumed adversaries that cause anxieties and discomfort but whose features are not seen clearly. Why do we need to conserve water? Do we? Who is the culprit? What is the truth about rising gasoline prices and the cost of electricity? Who's getting the gravy? What about skyrocketing costs of health care? What's responsible? Or who? Mismanagement? Rich doctors? And we could go on. We seem set upon by antagonists just beyond our reach and powers of identification. The discussions are going on — in the parks, the shops, the clubs, the streets — opinions abound, but the direction of discussion is

often circular. Most people come out just where they started. What is needed is a process to bring the issues out to center stage — to put the spotlight on them. We need to identify the issues and to state the necessary questions. That's the beginning of problem solving and it is the business of educational institutions.

2. *Promoting informed discussion.* It is true that lively discussions are sometimes dampened by an application of the facts. It is also true that the outcomes of discussion are likely to be productive to the extent that they are based on reliable information. How much does this nation actually have in the way of petroleum reserves? What is the breakdown in costs for one day of patient care in the hospital? How do our water reserves stand in relation to average daily per capita consumption? The source of information for examination of controversial issues needs to be objective, nonpartisan, and fruitful. A community college should have those capabilities.

3. *Involving many sectors of the community.* Based upon experience in other countries, such as Sweden where study circles have been most effective in the discussion of national issues, there is value in building upon existing alignments of people. But there is also benefit in cutting across organizational and association lines. People are at home with their friends in the clubs, the community organizations. They identify with the objectives of those organizations. They have a sense of identity in the organization or participation, a movement and vitality which can be highly

useful in establishing contacts with similarly qualified people in other organizations who are ready to confront common interests that cut across organizational lines. One is reminded that the true internationalists are those who are well grounded in the soil of their own culture.

4. *Developing a sense of involvement.* According to the Public Agenda Foundation Report in 1976: In the mid-60's, a one-third minority reported feeling isolated and distant from the political process. By the mid-70's, a two-thirds majority reported feeling that what they think "does not really count." Community forums would represent a new initiative to increase citizen discussion and broader participation and could well lead to further involvement in meetings with congressmen, citizen oversight bodies, crime prevention, safety, environment, welfare, child care, etc. According to the foundation report, greater participation requires overcoming of mistrust and cynicism and *practical and proven vehicles of implementation.* Community forums by community colleges could be one of those practical and proven vehicles.

According to the Agenda Foundation Report referred to above ("Moral Leadership in Government"), we need new initiatives to increase citizen participation. One urgent dimension is the use of practical and proven vehicles of informed public debate with broad participation.

Community forums sponsored by community colleges fit the need. More community colleges need to gain experience in how to conduct good forums, how to involve more persons, how to foster

action that has a broad base of informed support.

National Issues Become Local Agendas

Energy development and conservation, unemployment, saving our environment, public safety and individual security, better health care, honesty in government and business. These are national issues that can be translated into a local agenda for analysis, discussion, and action.

We believe the community college has a mission to engage itself in community-based research as well as citizen education. What better agenda than to tackle the actual problems that trouble our society and each of us as individuals? What better strategy than to involve as many citizens as possible in the local analysis, discussion, and in practical approaches to solutions?

This dynamic process is ideally a community enterprise. The community college, hopefully, is experienced in the identification of community needs and resources, in enlisting cooperation by a wide spectrum of community agencies, in using a variety of learning formats — including the mass media. The community college has subject area specialists and community education specialists. It has a mandate to serve its community.

This Assembly — and Afterwards

The Assembly brings together persons with experience in community forums and persons with the ability to move ahead with such forums in many community colleges. We hope that the interaction here will produce specific recommendations

addressed to specific persons and agencies who can help in this effort.

Community forums are learning devices that have been tested in many communities in many forms. Let us examine the state of the art, put it up against the needs of our times and the missions of our colleges and see whether we cannot produce some useful ideas of how to increase the use of these democratic devices.

After the Assembly, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges will share widely your recommendations — especially with the parties to whom they are addressed. But we ask you also to go home and test them in your own institutions. Community forums are not new. But we believe the time has come to use them more widely and to develop them more fully into devices for citizen education.

The State of the Art

By E. John Schonleber

Friedrich Nietzsche once described the human condition, at its best, as a "voyage into the dangerous 'perhaps.'" And while this may seem an unduly solemn note on which to begin a discussion on the art of developing and conducting community forums, it is not entirely inappropriate for the simple reason that sponsoring a forum, like a forum itself, is a risky business, a hazardous affair. The "dangers" which accompany the creation of a forum are due directly to the very nature of a forum and not simply to the usual hazards besetting human enterprises.

Concerned as we are, therefore, with an examination of the ways in which a

community college may serve as a sponsor or institutional base for community forums, we are perhaps well advised to reflect for a moment on the nature of a forum and implications of sponsorship.

Someone recently remarked that he wished to conduct a forum but that he was not entirely certain what a forum is. And this is not unusual for we are all more or less familiar with what we call a forum — so much so that, of late, it has even become a fashionable word in our vocabularies. We believe that we know a forum when we see one (when we are part of one); and we think, too, that we know in general what we want when we set about creating one. Reflecting on our experience with forums we can, presumably, derive a certain intelligence about them and acquire even that kind of knowledge which makes generalizations possible.

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Nonetheless, precise definitions of "community forum" do not exist; nor is there a "tried and true" handbook to guide us in the conception, development, and implementation of a forum. Yet just as a good cook need never use a recipe in fashioning a gourmand's delight, so too can a highly successful and beneficial community forum result from the creative imagination and energies of one planning such a project.

The observations and generalizations which are to be found in this paper are derived, therefore, not from searching inquiries or exhaustive scholarship; on the contrary, they are derived from a number of specific experiences (both immediate and at once removed) with community forums

in recent years. They are more truly the conclusions of common sense, the observations of a practitioner than those of a theoretician or scholar. So that they may have some common application, however, these observations have been generalized from the peculiarities of any particular forum. Taken together, they constitute at best a hesitant primer for the novice; for the seasoned programmer, they should at least effect echoes and render explicit the elements of their experience.

Continuous Process In Stages

On reflection it becomes apparent that the making of a community forum is a continuous process which can be reduced to a series of distinguishable stages, each with its own role and each possessing its own exigencies.

The most fundamental (and thereby controlling) feature of a forum concerns the identity, purposes, and possibilities of the forum itself — in a word, the general *nature* of a forum. And in attempting to state what a forum is, it is essential to bear in mind what it is not. Above all else, a forum is not a particular kind of program format: it is not a panel discussion, or a lecture series, or a public debate. A forum may employ such formats but it is never co-extensive with them. Moreover, a forum, unlike a debate, does not seek to resolve a problem; unlike a town meeting, a forum does not attempt to resolve an issue; unlike a task force, it has no task to perform; unlike a program of action, there is no action to be taken.

By intent (if not by definition), a forum is a process or state of affairs; it is

a kind of collective activity, a social undertaking characterized by inquiry and deliberation, serving no purposes beyond itself and without practical inspiration or direction. A forum is participatory, rather than passive; it is discursive and deliberative and never didactic; it is open and welcoming rather than restrictive or closed; it is voluntary and never compulsory; it is by design comprehensive of the full spectrum of possible points of view and convictions; it is disciplined and purposeful, yet dispassionate with respect to results; above all else, it is informed, for it seeks understanding.

A forum is serious-minded and thoughtful, although not humorless or somber; it is responsible and never whimsical, never capricious; it is radical in that it seeks to go to the very roots of one mode of human possibility; it is a sustained endeavor, and not occasional or episodic; it is popular in that it is timely and relevant to the needs and concerns of the public; it is probing and critical for it does not seek a consensus or decision. A forum becomes possible and is most apt to flourish in a particular kind of social climate: one in which the potential participants find themselves troubled or baffled, even bewildered by questions to which answers are not at hand, by problems for which there are no solutions, by demands for which traditional values and beliefs appear insufficient. It is from this manner of human predicament, from this kind of social condition that a forum derives its character and its distinctive vitality.

With some understanding of the nature of a forum and with some sense of the

conditions which render it appropriate, it becomes possible to fashion a plan and to develop the strategies for its realization.

Objectives, Strategies, Techniques

The planning and development of a community forum is not unlike a political campaign — but a political campaign of a particular kind. In effect, the date of the election may have been set, but the "candidate" remains to be identified; moreover, the candidate may prove to be totally unknown to the electorate; there may be little or no organizational base from which to work; and time may be very short indeed. On reflection it becomes apparent that a great deal must be accomplished, that there are many stages through which the "campaign" must pass, and that without a thoughtful plan of action, chaos rather than victory will be the result.

The plan necessary to the conception and development of a community forum must include the articulation of explicit *objectives*, the identification of specific *strategies* suited to the realization of those objectives, and the use of certain *techniques* apt to insure a forum characterized by the qualities already described.

The objectives or purposes of a community forum must be carefully clarified, for unless its purposes are fully understood both by those planning the project and by those participating within it, whatever results may indeed have merit, but not that of the merit being a realization of the intended forum.

This process of clarification is one which characteristically continues for all participants throughout the planning and

implementation of the program. To lose sight at any point of what it is that one wishes to accomplish is to invite diffuse and even counter-productive activities, however valuable in themselves. And while these carefully elaborated and clearly specified objectives may be seen initially as unnecessarily arbitrary constraints, gradually they will come to be appreciated as the indispensable guides and guarantors of discipline in the realization of the intended forum.

Although the reiteration, clarification, and explication of these objectives extend through the planning and implementation of the forum, a distinct stage of its development consists in the elaboration of a functional strategy for the realization of these objectives. It becomes necessary to inventory the range of factors affecting the implementation of the forum and to shape strategies to them.

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Identifying the Theme

The subject or theme must first be identified and because it is timely and significant, it is most often the immediate occasion for the decision to mount a forum. The choice of a subject or theme must nonetheless be responsive to an identifiable concern of the potential audience and it must likewise be articulated in language and in a form which is assuredly intelligible and persuasive.

Secondly, the forum which is to address this subject requires appropriate supportive, even authoritative, personnel and materials if the forum is to be informative and disciplined — if it is to achieve

heightened understanding among its participants.

Third, an effective forum presupposes thorough and thoughtful attention to its potential audience or participants. We are speaking in the present context of "community" forums and that community must not only be defined but it must also be analyzed in a manner which goes well beyond the traditional demographic categories. The audience must be recognized as diverse according to kind (age; sex; economic and social background; racial and ethnic characteristics; levels of education; need; familiarity with the subject matter of the forum, etc.). It must further be recognized as diverse according to the levels of interest and the proposed theme and the forum itself (ranging from the already deeply concerned and committed to the indifferent and the "passer-by"); and it must still further be analyzed according to the degrees of its accessibility and its readiness to participate (ranging from the commuter to the resident; from the individual confined through disability or through work to a fixed location to those who are highly mobile; from those with virtually no leisure time to those burdened by time on their hands, etc.).

Fourth, a well-planned forum must take into account the identity and suitability of institutional or organizational sponsorship for the forum itself or for components within it. It is possible, of course, to implement a forum through a single institutional sponsor, such as a community college, in which all responsibility is vested. But if one considers the

additional resources available through cooperative sponsorship (facilities, personnel, prior experience, established constituencies, etc.), as well as the very nature of a forum itself (as a broadly participatory enterprise solicitous of the widest spectrum of conviction and belief), it becomes clear that sponsorship through a number of independent, yet cooperating, institutions tends to create a variety of programs which are complementary and mutually reinforcing, reflecting better the differing interests and capacities of the sponsors and their constituencies. It is also true that such collective sponsorship is apt to engender a strong sense among participants that they are sharing in a broader and larger undertaking than they alone could attempt; indeed, experience shows that a forum so sponsored is strengthened by the fact that the "best" programs establish a model or a standard for the performance of other participating sponsors.

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The matter of institutional sponsorship deserves yet further comment for one must ask oneself to which institutions does one turn — what differentiating characteristics among institutions suggest reliably the likelihood of effective results? At least the following criteria or characteristics may be said to commend themselves to those planning a forum: First, is programming of an informal educational nature consistent with the primary objectives of the institution? Second, is the past experience or "track record" of the institution strong in such programming? Third, does the institution possess the necessary and qualified leadership and personnel and is the continuity of that leadership assured

for the duration of the organization's participation? Fourth, is there a clear and stable commitment to the importance of the forum's purposes? Fifth, does the institution already possess or have assured access to the facilities and resources necessary to their participation? Sixth, does the institution have an established audience and the means to communicate readily and effectively with its audience (or an extended audience)? Seventh, in light of the foregoing, is the institution's participation in the proposed forum assuredly manageable by its leadership, especially in view of its other commitments? The absence of an affirmative response to any one of these questions indicates a corresponding degree of probable failure.

Fifth, the allocation or distribution of responsibility for the success of the forum or any component of it may well prove to be of cardinal importance. The practice, too common even today, of imposing an already fully developed program on others for them to implement leads with predictable regularity to failure to implement the program at all, or to do so only partially or half-heartedly — or, at worst, to resist the imposition, leading to disaffection or even to competing and alternative programs. The very nature of a forum suggests that in planning, as in implementation, the process must be broadly and genuinely participatory. An effective forum requires, thereby, that a high degree of independence, initiative, and direct responsibility be vested in sponsoring and participating organizations, those charged with presenting or implementing a particular aspect of the forum, and those indi-

viduals who, in effect, constitute the forum itself. Each must act according to his or her own best judgment no matter how much assistance, guidance, and coordination are proffered.

Sixth, a successful forum is one which, more likely than not, draws upon a variety of program formats and seeks out innovative and even improbable program techniques. In view of the fact that communities are so widely diverse in their kinds of populations, in the levels of interest, etc., programming must employ formats suited to and accessible to these audiences. If there is a general rule, it must be that the kind of activity presented must be appropriate and congenial to the audience to be reached, of such a nature as to arrest their attention and to engage their participtipn.

Seventh, closely related to the effective choice of program formats is the selection of time and place for the forum's activities. Again, the diversity of intended audiences may require scheduling events at most any hour of the day, most any day of the week, and in locations too often ignored. One's periods of leisure may be brief and they may occur only in homes or at places of work in the major concourses of public life (supermarkets, city hall, banks, unemployment offices, and the like). A forum faithful to its peculiar nature and purposes is, thereby, one which is designed to reach people where they are and when they are free to turn their attention to questions of common concern.

Finally, mention must be made of the fundamental importance of communication to the success of a forum. The idea of

the forum and its objectives must be communicated effectively and repeatedly to principal sponsors and to those with direct responsibility for its realization; prospective participants must be clearly and fully informed of the date, time, and place of each event, as well as the nature of the event itself; and the events themselves must be communicative in that they are suited to the experience, education, and expectations of the intended audience. The idea of the forum, its objectives, and its components must be presented to all for whom it is designed; it must further be publicized; and, in today's world where we find ourselves so nearly overwhelmed by information, it must be promoted.

"To the Very Roots . . ."

Armed with the knowledge of what the creation of a forum implies and with the steady resolve to embark on such an enterprise, one may well achieve what we have already described as an activity which goes "to the very roots of one mode of human possibility." It is akin to what Matthew Arnold called "criticism," which "obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known . . . irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind." He continues, "Its business is simply to know and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas." He concludes, "It tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society . . . and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this stir

and growth come the creative epochs . . ."

A community forum at its best discloses that the spirit may be awakened in many ways — that the mind, no matter how simple or unlettered, no matter how subtle or refined, is never immune to the troubling which a vexing question engenders, nor the quest which the troubling propels — nor to the joy which companions bringing "light out of darkness."

To Reach the Unreached

By A. Hugh Adams and David A. Groth

Today's community college is committed to the extension of higher educational opportunities to all who can benefit. The institution is involved in a continuous effort to reach out and touch the lives of individuals through its many programs and activities. Through its open doors pass a variety of students pursuing diverse higher educational objectives. In many cases, the students have had no previous involvement in higher education nor any real expectation that higher education opportunities would be available to them.

In these circumstances, the community college must be adaptable and responsive to needs. These twin concepts are essential to an effective operation in today's rapidly changing educational scene. The community college movement is grounded in the belief that "what is educationally sound is administratively feasible." These concepts undergird the community college movement and have contributed to its success.

Empirical and theoretical descriptions of the community service concept (community based, community centered) abound. As recently as the spring of 1977, Wattenbarger posed some criteria for determining how well an institution has become a community based, community centered college. In some instances, the community dimension is receiving great emphasis. In support of this emphasis is the insistence that colleges must be responsive to all members of its constituency, not just a few privileged individuals who happened to possess the proper background and sufficient resources to attend. Careful consideration of the community dimension changes the college's concept of goals, faculty, facilities, needs, coordination, resources, boundaries, evaluation, and most other areas associated with postsecondary education.

Changing Service Concept

Rising social consciousness in the sixties lowered the threshold for understanding human need. The war on poverty, the Peace Corps, and civil rights phenomena heightened expectations of the ignored, and challenged the assumptions of

governmental service. The community college rose to prominence on the crest of this social change.

Continuing education, occupational and technical education, cultural and enrichment programs, up-grading, retraining and outreach became the tools of service. The college proved its ability to respond to the learning needs of many individuals in addition to recent high school graduates in the 18-22 year age group. Some have viewed these accomplishments as the completion of the community college dream — the capstone to the community college movement. A closer examination would undoubtedly lead to reconsideration of that notion. Indeed, it would appear that the community may very likely experience more dramatic changes in the decade ahead than during the last decade of growth and expansion of service. Certainly, new delivery systems, new approaches, and new concepts will be constant in the decade ahead.

The Unreached — Profiling and Targeting

By carefully analyzing the clientele of the community college, one could quickly determine that the unreached outnumber those served. One way to determine who the unreached are is to compare the population served to the total community population. By doing this, a profile of the unreached can be developed. For example, if 25,000 residents are between 45 and 55 years of age and the college only reaches 250 of that population or one percent, then ninety-nine percent are not served.

By doing a series of profiles of the community, the college can quickly deter-

mine the unreached population. Profiles reflect service to groups such as elderly, blacks, divorced, male, female, low income, semi-skilled, and others. As a result of these profiling efforts, the unreached could be targeted. Targeting, however, is but one step in reaching the unreached. Consideration of priorities of individual and community needs is also important.

Needs Assessment

Much heralded and seldom done are needs assessments. The term is used casually by educators. Many a program has failed because we offered what someone thought was needed — not what was wanted.

Needs assessment has to be something more than an anxious graduate student's dissertation. Needs assessment must be a dynamic interaction between community and college — person to person, give and take. It is a commitment to find out what the constituents really need — not to offer a warmed-over program given the last group. This type of assessment means a dedication to life-centered education.

Life-centered education probes individual needs and society's expectations and seeks to help people find fulfillment and success as family members, employees, citizens, or in other roles. The community forum is one way to assess life needs of unreached groups and to begin to take steps to meet these needs. Used properly, the community forum can serve as a catalyst to penetrate to the core of individual and community need.

A number of assumptions can be developed concerning the unreached. Colleges might assume that those with real needs make their wants known and are served accordingly. This assumption leads to an organized institutional posture emphasizing reaction to the squeaky wheels.

On the other hand, the pro-active approach assumes that every constituent group has needs which they may or may not be able to articulate. Under this assumption, a college reaches for various techniques for ferreting out the individual and collective needs of constituents. The community forum is one technique for accomplishing this objective.

The forum concept may have its roots in the colonist's town meeting. The idea of the forum is to have a place or assembly for open discussion of public matters or current questions. Forums may range from uncontrolled verbal and sometimes physical free-for-alls to carefully planned group involvement processes designed to achieve specific outcomes. They may be loosely structured or tightly organized. In either case, a successful forum involves detailed attention to planning, implementation, and follow up. Without proper prior planning, the best intentions will result in empty rooms, poor public relations, and disappointment.

The community college is uniquely suited to serve as a vehicle for public forums. Its programs and activities touch virtually every home and business in the area; it is a storehouse of knowledge, skills, and expertise which can be brought to bear on a given issue; it is generally nonaligned

in a political sense and can bring objective and dispassionate points of view to bear on issues of concern; and it generally enjoys public understanding and support. These qualities enable the community college to actively participate in the free exchange of ideas relative to problems of significance in the community and to actively participate in their solution.

Used creatively, forums may reach the elderly and assist them in developing a viable philosophy of life for the later years. A series of newspaper articles featuring elderly people could lead into a series of forums designed to expand the horizons for this under-utilized age group. Forums might be used to explore the barriers to educational opportunity for minority adults. Community groups such as the Urban League could provide leadership and cooperation in that respect. The fast growing population of single heads of households could also be reached through a forum process. Topics such as (1) coping with father/mother roles, (2) securing adequate child care, (3) understanding legal and financial responsibilities, (4) managing time for effective parenting, or (5) discovering new careers would possibly be of interest to these groups.

Planning Community Forums

Planning is an overworked word, but it is an essential step if the unreached are to be reached through forum activities. Following are a number of principles which are recommended in planning forum activities:

1. *Select forum target groups as a result of careful needs assessment.* The

target group should be selected only after thorough consideration of the group's needs in relation to college, community, and other objectives. Conducting a forum process involves a commitment of personnel, financial, and other resources. This fact should be carefully considered. The decision to initiate the forum process should result from a college-wide needs assessment leading to a formal institutional commitment to reach the group.

2. *Integrate the decision to reach the target group into the college's objectives.* Preferably the forum process would be an integral part of a well stated college objective to reach a previously unreached population. The objective could be to increase the involvement of the handicapped in college activities, to increase the enrollment and educational success of a minority population, or to initiate programs for an ever growing underemployed population. Whatever the objective, the chances of success increase when the goal is formally adopted as part of the college's annual or long-range plans.

3. *Develop a systematic plan for achieving the objective.* If the college is serious about reaching the unreached, then a systematic plan should be developed for achieving the objectives. Performance goals should be developed, time tables established, responsibility assigned, resources allocated, and evaluation planned. If it is worth doing, it should be done well.

4. *Involve representative advisory groups in the planning process.* Mt. Hood Community College used three distinct advisory committees to plan a conference

entitled "Choices Unlimited" and designed to generate dialogue among women concerning their role in society. This is one example of how much counsel is necessary to successfully implement a forum process. The formation and use of advisory groups is both an art and a science. It is a key to insuring broad support from those groups which can affect results.

5. *Insure a cross-section of community representatives in advisory groups.* The use of advisory groups should include consideration of change strategy. Representatives of the target group (consumers), should be an integral part, but it is also important to include individuals who are catalysts, communicators, and antagonists. Needed are persons who can be helpful in initiating the effort, others who can legitimize the process, and those who complete the detail work.

6. *Give advisory groups a specific charge and reward their efforts.* Whether one or several advisory groups are formed, they should be given careful written instructions. The limits of their authority and responsibility and the goal of their work should be defined. Nothing can be as frustrating to an advisory group as uncertainty concerning its mission.

7. *Solicit cooperation from other agencies in planning of programs.* One dean of community services advised that the forum topic must be seen as essential by "at least one influential community agency or group." Then at least "two spheres of influence are combined," and the potential audience expanded. Montgomery College cooperated with such

groups as the League of Women Voters, the Community Planning Board, a local developer, and others in a series of forum-type activities. Sharing of goals, responsibility, and credit for success is vital.

8. *Define long-range as well as short-range goals.* The forum process is not an end product but a means to an end. The goal for a college should not be to conduct a forum but to initiate a journey of self-discovery for the participants and those affected by the process. A short-range goal may be to identify the barriers to participation of a minority group in the educational process, but the long-range goal is to find means of eliminating those barriers, enrolling, teaching, and graduating students with competencies needed to fulfill individual as well as community needs. Coastline Community College's Job Fair on Career Opportunities in Allied Health was a one-day experience. However, it may have led to significant life changes in some individuals. Individuals nudged or pushed into life change process is the long-range result expected.

9. *The forum should include follow-up activities.* Broward Community College conducted town meetings in 20 different communities of its district. A needs assessment survey was conducted through local papers to identify major concerns of residents in each of these communities. As a part of the town meeting process, small group discussions were developed concerning each community's highest priority concerns. Small group leaders sought to focus discussion on action projects designed to alleviate the problems. In one community,

for instance, a citizens action group was formed to preserve public beach areas which were threatened by developers.

People planning for forum activities should anticipate the outcomes and prepare follow-up programs, specific classes, action groups, and other means of channeling the energy and motivation which may be created by the forum. If the college is participating in a catalytic program to expand the horizons of participants, then once those visions are expanded it would be appropriate to carefully lead the initiated on the next step of the life change process. This might include counseling, enrollment, or further special programs.

10. *Provide for appropriate rewards, recognition, and identity.* A community services dean advised that the importance of forum activities may be for some to see and others to be seen. Planning a forum should include consideration of why participants should attend. There must be something in it for the participants as well as the planners. A college should not overlook the rewards to its own staff for planning of such an effort. Typically, funding formulas do not provide for incentives for development of forum activities. Therefore, other means of rewarding the effort are necessary.

Implementing the Forum

Proper planning should lead to a successful forum. The actual implementation of the forum requires attention to procedural detail. Some principles which might be helpful in the implementation are as follows:

1. *The topic of the forum should generate excitement.* The president of one community college stated that the broader the topic, the more apathetic the people. Most individuals who have tried the forum approach note that the topic has to be capable of stimulating the interest of prospective participants so that they will be motivated to come. A topic such as Man and Society might have appeal to a disparate group, whereas Law and Its Impact on Women as presented by Coastline Community College focuses on a specific topic — law, and a specific group — women.

2. *Timeliness should be considered in planning the topic.* The bicentennial gave all of America the opportunity to reflect on our 200 years. Programs built around a futuristic or historical theme during the bicentennial year probably generated more interest then they would have in any other year. The college should be prepared to respond in a timely manner to local, regional, and national events. If a major employer moves out of a community, a well-planned forum process developed around the problems of coping with this situation would likely be successful. If the awareness of the needs of some community group, such as the handicapped, is heightened by legislative action or national publicity, likelihood of participation is increased.

3. *Location and time can ruin the best plans.* Failure to consider the best time and location can lead to great disappointment. The advisory committees, needs assessment, and extensive communication for the target group can help to avoid this pitfall.

4. *Select forum leaders, respondents, and speakers with drawing power.* Edith Green gave the keynote address for Mt. Hood's forum on "Choices Unlimited," and Patsy Mink, candidate for presidential nomination, appeared. Individuals such as these can be used to attract participation and their involvement should be incorporated into the overall purposes of the forum. Montgomery College co-sponsored a forum activity with the local Commission on Aging and drew on participants from the White House Conference on Aging. Community involvement and recognized leaders can assist recruitment and participation in the conference. Broward Community College cooperated with area chambers of commerce, business firms, and interested organizations to bring officials from the U.S. Department of State to a public forum on foreign policy. The broad-based participation in planning and sponsorship assured that sessions would include public high school students through senior citizens. As a result, the conference reached many persons of diverse ages and backgrounds on a theme of particular importance to the citizens at that time.

5. *Promotion is essential to forum success.* The forum planner should be certain not to think too small when promoting the programs. A fatal mistake is to think you will have too many participants. The best advice in this regard is to "think big."

6. *Use group process techniques in conducting the forum.* Behavioral science has evolved many useful tools for involving individuals in group processes. Forum planners should carefully consider the variety of formats, processes, products,

and alternatives for achieving the forum goals. The format should be developed to meet the unique needs and circumstances surrounding each situation. Variety within the forum is probably a good idea. Alternating between large group, small group, listening, talking, writing, discussing, and other activities would be good. The format must be designed with consideration for "pace." It shouldn't move too fast or too slowly.

Several new techniques should be considered in planning. The charette process of directed participation has promise for forum activities. A recent national conference on community schools and community colleges used this process to establish a blueprint for cooperative working relationships between the two domains. The Association of American Colleges used the charette process for dialogue on Liberal Education in the Community College. A charette can be used to develop a mission, rationale, goals statements, barriers for a community activity. A written product produced by charette participants gives a sense of ownership to each individual not usually achieved in some forum activities.

Another technique of group involvement which could be helpful is the nominal group process. This is a mechanism for obtaining maximum potential of all group participants by alternating individual brainstorming and controlled group participation. The greatest advantage of this process is that it equalizes the contribution of the overly verbal participants who can dominate a forum.

These techniques are given as evidence of a range of possible forum strat-

egies. Forum planners should consider the goals of the forum and design the format accordingly. As has been mentioned throughout this paper, the advice of community members would be most important in the development of the format.

Planning for Life

One coordinator of community services summed up how community colleges can best reach the unreached by saying that we should establish ourselves . . . "as life planning centers to which the community would turn for resources to help them pursue new directions, be they academic, social, or vocational." He advised that "characteristically, the unreached require personal contact and a topic with high vested interest appeal if they are to attend." This states well the need for the community college to be a life-centered institution involved in the life changes of individuals and communities. If colleges are to do this and use the forum activity, they should consider the following:

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1. Make community needs assessment a high priority for the coming year.
2. Assign specific responsibility for developing forum activities.
3. Involve the total college family in a self-assessment of its relation to the community served.
4. Conduct a charette or similar forum process enabling community leaders to identify significant community problems.
5. Assess whether college facilities and services are available to the community as perceived by the community.

6. Solicit community groups and agencies in reference to the college's willingness to respond cooperatively to community problems.

7. Submit to community evaluation of your program effectiveness.

Involving The Mass Media

By George A. Colburn and Darrell Icenogle

If you start with a great idea. . . . Then you publicize the hell out of it: You should reap the rewards. (For the private sector, there is a financial reward. For community colleges there is a different kind of payoff, given its mission of a more informed citizenry.)

There's no question that issues that affect us all need clarifying.

Energy, taxes, equal rights, foreign policy, criminal justice, ethics, the environment. You name topics like these and you can say in the same breath that we don't know enough about them. And in the end

it is the citizenry — informed, or confused — that must finally dispose of these topics.

Obviously, community forums could help, constituting a new and vital service offered by community colleges.

But without the necessary publicity — and without integrating the mass media into community forum planning — the idea will have little impact.

If this integration takes place, the media — newspapers, radio, TV, print materials — become more than a publicity vehicle; they become part of the forum program in addition to serving as the publicity vehicle in a much more important manner than usual.

Roles of Media

The key to successfully integrating the media is to understand what they can and cannot do . . . and further, what the media will and won't do.

1. If properly utilized, the media can generate publicity, i.e., create awareness that a community forum is taking place.

Hustling press releases and public service announcements to the media is one thing. But if a community college can tie publicity information to a heavy media program, it's quite another. If the resources of the college and the community are being brought to bear on a topic of great concern, the media would be crazy not to become involved.

2. The media can stimulate participation in the forum, create a feeling of urgency about the issue or problem being confronted, and provoke meaningful dialogue that could lead to positive action.

Community forums should constitute the critical link between creative thought and action. And when real action is likely to take place, the media are interested. They are interested in readers, viewers, customers, more influence in the community, being a good source of news — and their participation will not be limited to printing and taking times, dates, and names. They become part of a process to create genuine interest within the community.

3. The media can convey information in a powerful and graphic manner. For example, without the media, how could we have understood the full scope of environmental damage to the land and waters of America in recent years?

Just as important as understanding what the media can do, community college forum planners must understand the limitations of the media.

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1. The media cannot salvage a bad program. The issues selected must strike a public chord, and therefore must be carefully identified. Planning, execution, and follow-through must be of sufficient quality to merit media attention. If proper attention is not paid to an initial project, the media will not likely become involved again. The media have grown weary of being used and abused in the name of public service.

2. The media cannot unilaterally bridge the gap between media professionals and educators who are ill-informed of media values.

Community colleges must assign roles with the thought in mind of letting every-

one do what he/she does best. Do not permit amateurish tampering by either media professionals in a primarily educational component, or by academic professionals in a primarily interest-generating component. Narrow-minded criticism from both sides should be anticipated and endured. Both will become faint voices if the job is well-done, earning the praise of an enthusiastic public.

3. The media are inappropriate as vehicles for conveying information, data, and analysis in an in-depth fashion.

Let us finally dispense with the myth of the TV classroom. When the classroom is used as a model for TV programming, the result is a disservice to both TV and higher education. Traditional educational TV programming has proved to be inadequate in stimulating interest for those programs saturated with information content. If community colleges insist on such programs as part of its community forum, the public is not likely to get excited about the topic under consideration.

From the onset, there must be a commitment to quality. Adding community forums to the community college's agenda must not be a slap-dash affair. Whoever is in charge of forum planning at the college must make certain that everyone is working toward a goal of excellence. If the administration believes "things will take care of themselves," if the public service staff believes the media will take care of publicity, if the faculty doesn't want to be involved, then the forum will flop.

Quality, to some, in a program that integrates an educational institution and the media, is a loaded word; it points to the seemingly vast space that separates media values and academic values. This needn't be the case, however.

To many in the media world, academia is a dry and dull place. To many in the academic world, the media thrive on superficiality and sensationalism. What a community forum ought to do is take advantage of the strengths of both, thus minimizing their weaknesses. The media in its abrupt and stimulating fashion can create interest and enthusiasm — a yearning for knowledge which the classroom, the book, the newspaper, or the community forum can satisfy. Educational programs can, conversely, offset the superficiality of the media. Media-mix and cooperation are the formula for quality.

Television, for example, can stimulate awareness and interest through graphic portrayals. Its "thousand words" might then yield to the print media for data, analysis, and penetration. Finally, the presentations of the media can be adapted, assimilated, and "owned" by individuals through the dynamics of face-to-face interaction with peers and experts in the community forum.

These uses of media coincide with media values. They also coincide with educational values, if taken together. And, most important, they coincide with popular values which must be considered if a successful program is to be formulated.

In this fashion, the media and higher education can lend value to one another,

and provide important service to the public. The media can bring the programs of a community college to the public's attention, and the community college can bestow credibility and prestige upon the media — but only if a proper relationship is forged from the outset.

Concerns About Costs

Television time and production costs are not cheap. The same is true of newspaper space, or radio time.

But a community forum, properly planned, should not be terribly concerned with such costs. The media are involved and willing to donate their resources as part of their important role in generating interest in a crucial topic and providing information about that topic.

Across the country currently, almost 500 newspapers are contributing at least a half-page a week as their role in offering Courses by Newspaper. In that half-page, a noted scholar or observer of the contemporary scene comments on a topic of concern to most Americans. The newspaper, of course, promotes the series, which serves as an outline for a credit course, and a framework for community forums. The possibilities for creating community interest in a topic are almost endless once the media commitments are obtained.

One university extension dean estimated that he was getting $10,000 worth of free publicity for the course, his division, and the university itself during the four months the newspaper series appeared in his newspapers. In return, that dean organized activities related to the

series that were held on the campus, featured faculty members and were open to all members of the community following the series in the newspaper.

That concept is now being tested by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges and 12 community colleges around the country. Called CbN Community Forums, they are funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which also funds Courses by Newspaper. In all of these forums, there is significant use of media other than newspapers.

If planned properly, the forums should not cause significant new outlays of funds by the community colleges. However, a quality effort will have its costs.

In some cases, the college will want to develop its own media programs for its own outlets, or for educational and public outlets in the community. This will mean costs in terms of salaries and equipment.

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But already community colleges have a budget for public service activities. Thus, each college interested in the concept of community forums must look at its existing community programs and decide if a film, lecture, or concert series should be curtailed or eliminated in order to implement properly a community forum.

A less painful way to proceed would be a linking of existing programs to the topic of the forum. The cost involved would be in the time spent by a forum coordinator and certain internal anguish over disruption of plans that called for something different.

Because the community college is in the business of education, it is only natural

to envision a credit course being one aspect of a community forum. On the one hand, it produces revenue for the college, and on the other it serves a select clientele that will want to delve deeply into the subject matter and earn credit for their efforts.

In addition, the involvement of the media will mean more attention paid to the college by the general public. Those concerned enough about the topic, who take advantage of the forum activities, will not only learn more about the topic by participating, but will learn more about what the college has to offer as well. They will see, or be a part of, creative, substantial programming. They will see dynamic instructors taking a difficult subject and making it clear. They will be impressed by the college's ability to be timely, relevant, and exciting.

Results and Well-Being 49

If the aesthetics of the medium — be it newspapers, radio or TV — are always kept in mind during the planning period, and the programming is thoughtfully and tastefully carried out, the college will be able to reach very large numbers and stimulate many of them to become involved in a process that means a great deal to the future health and well-being of their community.

The media's role at this point is pretty much accomplished; it has done what it can do best. An audience has been created and supplied with basic information through media programming.

The college faculty and the experts the college has mobilized now take over.

The audience they will interact with wants to go beyond the basics provided by the media. It will only be satisfied by outstanding human resources who have prepared outstanding programs.

If this happens, it is assured that the college will have increased its stature in the community while fulfilling its mission of public service.

In the future, the community will look to the community college for leadership on questions of significant public concern. And that's the position the community college should want to be in.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

MAR 3 1978

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES

From Forum to Action

By Ralph Doty

This Assembly was formulated to focus on how a community college can provide the local institutional base for community forums. Other papers offered at the meeting will explain in detail how community forums can be designed most effectively.

It is the purpose of this paper to urge that once a community forum is held on a community college campus, a strong and vigorous effort must be made for follow-up activities as they relate to the forum. In effect, it is my contention that a com-

munity college which conducts a forum, and then believes that all that has to be done has been done, is doing the forum participants a huge disservice.

A word of caution. Since the author's background is that of a former elected public official recently turned community college president, he has confined his remarks to follow-up activities only as they relate to working with public officials who are in some way either a part of the problem being discussed, or part of the solution to the problem.

Problem of Effectiveness

The problem, in a nutshell, is how a community college engaged in community forums can help participants learn how to act on the information they received in the forums. How can the community college inform forum participants on methods of having some effective input into the decision making process?

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It is my contention that holding a forum on a community college campus is only half the task. A forum that fails to advise participants on how to act on what they have learned is a failure.

Because government has become so complex, there is a growing feeling among citizens that they are helpless to do anything to correct problems. Therefore, it is my belief that the most difficult part of a forum may not be the informational portion; advising participants how to act on that information may be the most trying task before the forum planners.

It is a constant source of amazement to me at how little our citizens really know about government and the process in-

volved in solving problems at the governmental level. I am convinced after serving two terms in the Minnesota Senate that very few people understand the governmental process.

First of all, people are confused by the numerous levels of government. For example, where do the responsibilities of city government end and state government begin? With the areas of responsibility of various levels of government overlapping more and more each year, it becomes more difficult to know where to go when one wants to solve a problem.

There is additional confusion because of the proliferation of more and more laws at all levels of government. Not only do citizens have to cope with more laws, but now there is the problem of interpreting the thousands of rules and regulations designed by non-elected officials to implement the enforcement of those laws. You may not have to be a genius to know about and understand all laws and rules and regulations, but it certainly helps.

A Dilemma for Citizens

It is not an exaggeration to say that faced with an increasingly complex governmental structure at all levels, the average citizen is totally confused and helpless to act.

Let me cite several instances of that confusion.

In the two terms I served in the state senate, and even though I did everything humanly possible to keep my constituents informed about my activities, I was constantly being asked by constituents how things were going in Washington. The

state capitol is in St. Paul. That was where all state legislators had their offices. But many people, perplexed by government, thought I was located in the nation's capital.

While I was in St. Paul five months each year during the legislative session, my wife often got calls from constituents at my home in Duluth. They wanted to discuss something with me, and they frequently became angry when she told them I was in St. Paul because the legislature was in session. It wasn't because the constituents didn't have ample opportunity to know that I was in session. The local media constantly carried stories about our activities. It was, in my opinion, pretty difficult NOT to know we were meeting. But the calls kept coming.

There are many more examples of this general confusion in light of a complex government. But the message seems clear. People don't understand how government works. And since most community college forum issues will somehow involve a governmental unit which is either part of the problem or part of the solution, it is imperative that a forum help citizens cope with the information given to them.

Too often a citizens' meeting in a community turns out to be a "bitching" session. Citizens arise to angrily cry that they are being wronged on a specific issue, and "somebody" is responsible for it. And when the meeting is over, nothing is solved. People are just as angry when they leave as when they arrived. The frustration level remains high and nothing is really accomplished.

A question which must be an integral part of any forum is, "How do the participants take what information the forum has given to them and apply it towards solution of the problem?"

Some Suggestions

What follows are only some suggestions for preparing forum participants for action. It is important to remember that throughout this phase of the forum, the community college must remain totally impartial on the specific issue. If there are two or more sides to the issue, then participants on all sides should be advised on how to proceed.

In all cases, these suggestions relate to dealing with public officials who are either part of the problem or who might be part of the solution.

1. Usually the favorite answer to the question, "How do I get some action from Legislator X" is: "Write him a letter."

That is not a poor suggestion, but it is not by any means the only way or the best way to effect change on an issue. Certainly people attending a forum should be told that writing a few letters stating their side of the issue will be helpful.

And if letters are sent, participants should be warned that when writing to officials, particularly elected officials, nothing offends more than a mimeographed form letter. Most public officials I know would rather get no letter at all than a form letter. A form letter doesn't show interest. It only means that someone knew how to sign his/her signature to a letter which someone else wrote because the signer was too lazy to do it.

The personally written letter is difficult to ignore. But it is only the beginning in an effort to bring about change.

2. Forum participants should be informed of any existing organizations through which they might work to reach their goal. The community college should be careful that a balanced list of organizations on various sides of the issue be disseminated.

3. If an organization to tackle a problem does not exist, participants should be instructed on how an organization might be formed at the local level. Again, the college should be certain that it is completely impartial on the issue before the forum.

4. If public officials must be dealt with in correcting whatever situation is discussed at the forum, participants might be encouraged to get directly involved in the legislative process. For example, at the state level there are a number of interesting techniques used by citizens to attract attention to their cause.

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a. A trip to the state capitol by citizens' groups is always effective if handled in a way that appears to be nonthreatening to the legislator. A busload of participants might divide into groups to meet at predesignated times with specific legislators.

Once the citizens get into the legislator's office, they should make their case in about five minutes and depart after leaving a brief position document with the legislator. Brief and to the point —that is the way to get to the lawmaker.

I know of many groups of fifty or fewer people who came from faraway

places and who were each assigned to see one or two of the 67 senators in their Minnesota Capitol offices. The group often completed their lobbying in one day, and it got its message across in a very personal way.

b. If the legislature is not in session, many activist groups make efforts to meet with legislators in their home districts. This is usually not as successful as going to their capitol office because most legislators hold other jobs and are more difficult to reach. But it works.

c. If a legislative committee has a hearing scheduled on the forum topic, participants should be urged to be at the hearing. There is power in numbers, and often just the physical presence of a group of people interested in a specific piece of legislation is a powerful force to get some action on a measure. Of course, if possible, participants should be urged to testify at the hearing.

d. Some groups hold a meal meeting to which legislators are invited to hear the various sides of an issue. The problem with this technique is that it is expensive and sometimes too slick in appearance. Also, many legislators get too many similar invitations and they tend to ignore most of them.

5. Forum participants should be urged to get involved in political campaigns to increase their own influence in the decision-making process. This is an often-stated suggestion, and one which is generally ignored by most people.

There are many reasons why people should be urged to work in political cam-

paigns, but perhaps none is more important than the doors it opens. For example, many lawmakers do not have enough time in a day to meet with everyone who comes to their offices to visit with them. But I have yet to meet an elected official — given the choice of meeting with a stranger or listening to someone he/she personally knows because the visitor worked in his/her campaign — who refused to meet with the person who worked in his/her campaign.

Put another way, if time is limited it is very easy to tell your secretary you cannot meet with someone you've never seen before. But it is virtually impossible to say you'll not meet with someone who worked in your campaign. Most politicians cannot be bought, but they can be compelled to listen to people who helped them get into the office they hold.

6. A bibliography of follow-up reference material on the forum subject will be helpful. The bibliography should be brief and concise. No need to make it long to dazzle the participants.

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7. Once the forum concludes, the community college should take the responsibility of keeping participants informed of any late developments on the subject discussed. It may not be possible to do this for a long period of time, but for at least several months after the forum any newspaper article, magazine article or similar material should be duplicated and mailed to participants. Do not assume that forum participants have a wide range of material coming to their homes to keep themselves informed of such developments.

8. Is a governmental body or agency meeting on a matter related to the issue previously discussed in the forum? The community college should take the responsibility of making certain that forum participants learn of that meeting. Whether the participants will take advantage of that opportunity is beyond the college's control, of course. But at least they should know about it.

9. A community college which sponsors a forum on an important contemporary issue should be prepared to hold a follow-up forum at a later time. Things change. Some new developments which put a different slant on the issue may have taken place. There may be some new perspectives on the issue. A follow-up forum would keep interest alive.

10. Once a forum has been completed, every effort should be made to make certain that public officials who might be part of the problem or part of the solution learn about what took place at the forum. Of course, it would be best if those public officials attend the forum. But many will not.

11. If the eventual solution of the problem discussed at the forum is to take place in a legislative body, whether it be at the city, county, state, or federal level, a portion of the forum program should be devoted to the following descriptions:

a. Specifically, which levels of government will be involved in resolving the problem?

b. Are there areas of overlapping responsibility between and among certain levels of government? If so, what are those

areas and how can they be best approached?

c. If a law must be enacted to solve the problem, what are the specific steps in the legislative process. (Most Minnesotans are surprised to learn, for example, that there are 16 specific steps to getting a law passed in the two houses of the Minnesota Legislature). Only if people understand the legislative process can they understand how to work effectively for their cause when governmental bodies are involved.

d. If the solution to the problem lies in working with a governmental agency or department, how is that agency or department organized? Who are the bureaucrats specifically designated to work on those problem areas?

After the Forum Is Over

It may be an overstatement to say so, but it is really not very difficult to put together an informational meeting labeled "community forum." Line up a few speakers, allow some time for questions, have some small group discussion.

It is what is done AFTER the forum participants have gone home that is important. If the participants are not armed with some ideas for turning information into action, the forum will have failed.

In a community forum, information without knowledge to convert that information into action is really quite worthless.

Report of the 1977 Assembly

The Assembly met November 6-8, 1977, at Airlie House, Warrenton, Virginia. Following discussions on the first two days, Stephen Silha drafted a report. It was reviewed by the participants at the final session. The report is presented here for further study, discussion, and action by readers.

The very roots of American democracy may be threatened by public apathy and cynicism. The community college has the ability and the responsibility to help meet today's needs for an informed, in-

volved, responsible citizenry by facilitating community forums on issues which are most important to people's lives. For example:

A new highway is planned to ring a middle-sized town. It becomes so controversial that a public referendum is scheduled on several alternative developments. A local community college, together with the League of Women Voters, environmental awareness groups, the highway department, and other agencies, organize a forum to explore the consequences of different approaches.

A community college structures a series of community forums in the humanities, using Courses by Newspaper materials on "Crime and Justice," coordinating its efforts with a wide variety of community organizations and a national network of institutions engaged in a demonstration project supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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Using "Great Decisions" materials provided by the Foreign Policy Association and resource speakers from the U.S. Department of State, a community college uses a community forum to help local citizens discuss the issues in the Panama Canal treaty and how they affect local business and other interests.

Concerned with rising fuel bills, a group of citizens in California ask staff at the community college to help them learn what they can do to lower costs. Representatives from utility companies, experts on alternative energy sources, government

researchers, environmentalists, and humanists join in a forum that ends with more understanding of energy issues.

These examples, and many others, grew out of two days of lively dialogue among community college, government, business, and community leaders. They only begin to illuminate the enthusiasm for the concept of community forums — tempered with some caution and academic restraint — which this Assembly felt.

An outgrowth of the educational missions of people-oriented community colleges, issue-based community forums represent an important teaching-learning process in those skills most essential to democracy—responsible citizenship skills.

Community Forum Concept

Historically, the forum was the "public meeting place for open discussion" in a community *(Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary)*. Today, short of shopping centers, we have few such places. Central to the mission of community colleges is the development of space and skills that make people effective citizens in a democracy. Therefore, community colleges should take the leadership in facilitating or convening community forums on public issues. Such forums are structured but open exchanges of opinion and information on issues of demonstrated common concern. They bring broad participation from the community for informed discussion using a two-way process. The community college is often uniquely qualified to organize and coordinate with other local

agencies to gather and present expertise on an issue.

Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., president of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, told Assembly participants: "There is a great deal of talk today about going back to the basics in education. Certainly there is nothing more basic than giving adults an opportunity to participate in the democratic process. The community forum, where all people can come together to consider vital issues and make their voices heard, is a device that can provide for such democratic participation. It should not be an add-on to the college program — but central to it."

Federal Interest

Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Hodding Carter III, moved by a keen sense of urgency and the possibilities which he saw in the Assembly, put aside his prepared remarks in the opening session. "I believe what you are doing could be a crucial contribution to public understanding," he said. "You have a magnificent institutional ability to do something about the profound sense of powerlessness of the American people." He said President Carter authorized him to relay two messages: (1) that community forums as described in the Assembly papers come closer to realizing the rhetoric of his campaign on public participation than almost anything he's heard about; (2) that he commits all departments of government to assist in this.

Assembly participants agreed that there are many models for successful community forums, some of which are men-

tioned in the background papers. The college should keep its role in perspective, they warned — that of informing and stimulating the learning process. It is neither an advocacy nor an adversary role. The community college should try to see that a range of points of view is presented and dialogue encouraged on a given issue.

Air All Points of View

Issues should be carefully chosen. A community college beginning to offer forums is wise to choose an issue that is "open for discussion" in the particular community, and to build a record as a responsible forum-builder before tackling sensitive or emotionally charged issues. The Assembly characterized relevant issues as those having an important impact on people's lives; having more than one side provoking the need for objective information; and requiring a decision.

The development of the forum *process,* however, is as important as the issues themselves. A fair, vital process of communication and education — based on the innate worth and dignity of each human being — will help the college "reach the unreached." It will ensure that the community college extends its service and vitality to the community, giving each citizen an opportunity to listen and be heard.

The community college should forge or reinforce linkages with such other community institutions as schools, businesses, and labor. If it does, the college will be able to serve as a leader in its many partnerships with the community.

Nuts and Bolts Talk

While most Assembly discussion focused on policy and function of community forums, there was some nuts and bolts talk. Methods for stimulating public interest, such as Chatauquas, door-to-door interest polls, newspapers, mobile discussion vans, "graffiti boards" in public places, computer or electronic response systems, group rallies, TV and radio call-in programs, simulations, family forums, demonstration projects, and delphic probes were cited as especially well suited to community forums. Possible dimensions, techniques, participants, structure, and resources for forums were explored. Emphasis was on dialogue *with*, not *at*, the community.

Though costs may vary, funding for these forums is needed, and might be available in different forms in different states (through local businesses, agencies, foundations, U.S. Office of Education, arts and humanities endowments, state governments, etc.) Often, forum costs can be shared.

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How Much Action?

Assembly participants made a wide range of suggestions on the extent to which the community college should be involved in activities following the forums. While it was generally agreed that community colleges should stimulate citizens to act on what they learn at forums, some community college educators insist that it is not their role to encourage any particular actions.

There was some concern, too, about co-sponsoring forums with groups that

might not be "desirable" affiliates. Reactive or punitive legislation could result. Most colleges with broad community relations/community services experience, however, were less concerned; many community colleges have processes, they say, for screening out problems with the use of college resources — and for disengaging the college from any activist groups that might result from a college-sponsored activity.

Recommendations of the Assembly

Most important aspects of Assembly discussions are reflected in the recommendations the group made. The largest number are directed toward community colleges and toward the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC). Others are made to President Carter, federal departments, and national organizations.

Community colleges should:

1. Make sure forums are well planned, based on community needs assessments, and clear in purpose and agenda.
2. Develop structure and capability to provide, promote, and lead community forums as part of their missions.
3. Identify a person or persons to assume responsibility for community forums.
4. Serve as facilitator and convenor.
5. Train and involve leaders of unreached subgroups in the community.
6. Tie programs to the commitment of President Jimmy Carter to have government agencies respond to such forums.

7. Work with other institutions to identify, develop, refine, and expand forum ideas and techniques (and disperse responsibilities where appropriate).

8. Serve as clearinghouse for local forums, possibly providing background materials, speakers' bureau, moderators, resource referrals.

9. Use forums as a way to extend educational services to all segments of the community.

10. Implement and integrate public affairs education into college programs.

11. Work with various media to extend and promote community forums.

12. Make the most use of the vast and talented human resources, including faculty, in the community.

13. Be willing to take risks to help enliven and preserve democracy.

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges should:

1. Give follow-up attention to the community college role in public affairs education.

2. Review its priorities, and give community forums more emphasis in its publications, meetings, and activities.

3. Develop resource materials on community forums: a "how-to" forum factbook, a directory of resources and models, "forum syllabi" on selected issues, formal techniques to train facilitators.

4. Initiate a process for identifying a limited number of critical issues that are both universal and locally relevant — then lead development of educational resources content and process that can be used by community colleges to present forums on these issues.

5. Establish linkages with appropriate national organizations (League of Women Voters, labor unions, business organizations, etc.) in order to facilitate state and local linkages toward citizen participation programs and forums.

6. Urge faculty-related organizations (NEA, AFT, AAUP) to take an aggressive and positive posture toward programs designed to enhance citizen participation.

7. Explore with the U.S. Office of Education and other agencies the possibility of funding for training forum leadership.

8. Work with media groups, such as the American Newspaper Publishers Association and the National Association of Broadcasters, to promote community forums as an extension of the media role.

Community colleges should work with local media to:

1. Consider tying special coverage into community forums, e.g., "An Evening with the Issues."

2. Make more use of two-way devices on decidable issues, such as phone-ins, polls, etc.

3. Work together on FCC-required ascertainment of community need.

Federal government should:

1. Increase its support of forum techniques (through such agencies as the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Science Foundation, U.S. Office of Education, or National Institute of Education) as a vehicle for gaining greater citizen participation.

2. President Carter, in light of his commitment to renewing the town meeting

concept, should communicate with various governmental departments and community college presidents to urge the importance of fostering and supporting community forums.

Other agencies should also take action:

The National Endowment for the Humanities should encourage and facilitate community forum activities by: (1) disseminating information on the forum process/technique; (2) providing background and enrichment materials for forum issues; (3) developing training programs for persons both at community colleges and within the community on the art of moderating and conducting community forums.

The state-based humanities committees should be encouraged to continue supporting community forums, disseminate information on them, and seek out additional community college linkages.

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The Foreign Policy Association and *Courses by Newspaper Community Forums* projects should be commended for helping to develop the community forum and be recommended to community colleges considering options for forums.

The Association of Governing Boards and *the Association of Community College Trustees* should endorse citizenship participation in community forums and forum development programs.

The Brookings Institution should include in its forthcoming national study of community college financing the need for funding community college public service programs — such as community forums — as an integral part of basic funding

formulas for community colleges.

The Carnegie Commission on Public Broadcasting, the *U.S. Office of Education*, the *Corporation for Public Broadcasting*, and *foundations* should explore the potential of public television and radio linked with community forums for citizenship education.

In Conclusion

The community college is uniquely suited to lead communities into thoughtful discussion of critical issues. As a result, this Assembly urges community colleges to see community forums as a basic and important part of their mission toward developing more enlightened citizens and more democratic communities.

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